Balochistan bar body condemns JCP decision

Calls strike today over suspension of judge's confirmation

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: The Balochistan Bar Council (BBC) has expressed serious concern and anger over a recent decision of the Judicial Commission to suspend the confirmation of a highly competent and upright judge on the grounds of his brother's political affiliation.

It also announced a province-wide court strike across Balochistan on Wednesday (today) in protest against what it described as the Judicial Commission's unjust and discriminatory decision.

The council demanded that the Judicial Commission immediately review and reconsider its decision. In a statement issued on Tuesday, BBC Vice Chairman Jadeen Dashti Advocate, Executive Committee Chairman Ayaz Khan Mandokhail, and Executive Committee members Muhammad Afzal Harifal, Nadir Ali Chhalgari, Najeebullah Khan Kakar, and Rahib Khan Buledi strongly criticised the decision, terming it a clear case of bias, prejudice, and discrimination.

The statement said the judge concerned, Justice Ayub Tareen, enjoys an unblemished reputation for integrity, impartiality, professional competence, and judicial dignity. It emphasised that there are no allegations of corruption, bias, or incompetence against him.

Targeting such a capable and honest judge merely because of a relative's political association with the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, the council said, is unconstitutional and unjust, and undermines the independence and neutrality of the judiciary.

The council further stated that linking a judge's eligibility and competence to the political affiliations of family members promotes the unfair concept of collective responsibility, which has no place in Pakistan's constitutional and legal framework. Such practices, it added, seriously damage public confidence in the judiciary and are highly condemnable.

Reaffirming its commitment, the council declared that it would not tolerate any compromise on the independence and dignity of the judiciary and would raise its voice against this biased approach at every constitutional and legal forum.

NATIONAL Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar hold a meeting with Balochistan Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail and Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti at Parliament House in Islamabad.—White Star

NA speaker, Dar meet Bugti, Mandokhail

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA: National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq discussed key issues facing Balochistan with Governor Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail and Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti during a meeting at the Parliament House in Islamabad on Tuesday. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar also attended the meeting.

According to officials, the participants held detailed discussions on the law and order situation in Balochistan, public welfare initiatives, and other matters of mutual interest. Emphasis was laid on strengthening coordination between the federation and the province to ensure sustainable peace and development.

Speaker Sadiq stressed the need to safeguard the rights of women and youth in Balochistan, highlighting their role in social development and long-term stability. He said Balochistan holds a special place in his heart and reiterated that resolving the province's issues is among the top priorities of the current government.

Ishaq Dar said the immediate and effective implementation of infrastructure, education, and health projects in Balochistan is a top priority of the federal government. He termed the welfare and development of the people of Balochistan a national responsibility.

Mr Sadiq said Balochistan's development is a guarantee of Pakistan's overall progress, adding that joint efforts by parliament and the federal government would ensure the province's sustainable development. He said Pakistan's progress is closely linked to the progress of Balochistan.

CM Bugti appreciated the efforts of security forces and law enforcement agencies in maintaining peace and order in the province. The participants lauded Speaker Sadiq's role in promoting stronger linkages between federal and provincial democratic institutions, as well as his effective conduct of National Assembly proceedings.

The meeting concluded with an agreement to further strengthen cooperation between the federation and the Balochistan government in the interest of peace, stability, and development.

Another 200 students, pilgrims return from Iran

By Behram Baloch & Saleem Shahid

GWADAR/QUETTA: More than 200 students, pilgrims and other Pakistani nationals have returned home from Iran over the past two days through the Gabad-250 Ramadan border in Gwadar district, while more students were expected to arrive on Wednesday.

Gwadar Deputy Commissioner Naqeeb Ullah Kakar said that on Tuesday a group of Pakistani students from different parts of Iran reached Gabad and were later shifted to Gwadar.

"A total of 51 students reached Gwadar late in the evening, including 24 female and 27 male students," he told *Dawn*, adding that they would be sent to their respective cities under security arrangements. He said Pakistani officials in Tehran had informed authorities about the students' return, after which all arrangements were made for their stay and security in the port city.

A senior official in Gwadar said the students who returned from Iran were enrolled at Zanjan University of Medical Sciences, which was closed by the Iranian government due to a rise in violent incidents. The students belong to different cities of Punjab and Sindh. "Over the past two days, more than 80 students have returned to Pakistan from Iran," a security official told *Dawn*.

CM orders inquiry into rejection of Health Card

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has taken serious notice of reports of the suspension of treatment under the Health Card scheme at some hospitals in Karachi and other cities, directing the authorities to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

Officials said on Tuesday that the chief minister not only took notice of the complaints but also expressed strong displeasure, instructing provincial health officials to probe the issue.

"Under no circumstances should the treatment of patients from Balochistan be stopped under the Health Card scheme introduced by the provincial government," the chief minister said. He also ordered that all outstanding dues of hospitals be cleared.—Staff Correspondent

PTI formally proposes Achakzai as opposition leader in NA

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belong to the opposition and who commands the confidence of the majority of the members sitting on the opposition benches".

"In view of the foregoing, we hereby affirm that Mehmood Khan Achakzai enjoys the confidence and support of the majority of the members belonging to the opposition, and is, therefore, the most suitable person to hold this constitutional office.

"The timely appointment of the leader of the opposition will ensure the effective discharge of constitutional and parliamentary responsibilities entrusted to the opposition. We therefore request that, after following necessary procedures for the appointment of the leader of the opposition in accordance with the Rules of Procedure and the previous parliamentary practices, MNA Mehmood Khan Achakzai may please be appointed as leader of the opposition in the National Assembly of Pakistan at the earliest."

Later while talking to media persons, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan hoped that Mr Achakzai would be notified as leader of the opposition by Thursday. He said that the verification of the documents would be completed by Wednesday (today). He also said that only one nomination has been filed for the slot of opposition leader.

While replying to a question, Barrister Gohar said there was no forward bloc within the PTI and all the leaders were united under the leadership of Imran Khan and no one could disagree with the decision of the PTI founder.

Incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan had named Mr Achakzai for the opposition leader's slot in the NA in August last year, nearly two weeks after the Election Commission of Pakistan disqualified him following his conviction in cases pertaining to riots on May 9, 2023.

The opposition had also submitted the nomination papers for Mr Achakzai — who also heads the opposition alliance Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan — to the speaker's office in October 2025.

Father, son among four gunned down in Bannu ambush

By Muhammad Waseem Khan

BANNU: Four people, including a man and his son, were killed on Tuesday when armed assailants opened fire on a moving car in the Gulbadeen Landi Dak area, within the jurisdiction of Haved police station in Bannu.

The victims were travelling towards Bannu city when attackers, reportedly lying in ambush, opened indiscriminate fire on their vehicle. As a result, Naseeb-ul-Rehman , his son Hamid, Imran alias Ziaullah, and Bismillah died on the spot.

The bodies were later shifted to a hospital for medico-legal formalities. Police said the victims were close relatives.

A case was registered on the complain of Wali Rehman, son of Misal Khan, who stated that his relatives were travelling in their car when unknown armed men shot them dead.

District Police Officer Bannu, Yasir Afridi, said an investigation had been launched and evidence was being collected. He added that it would be premature to declare the incident an act of terrorism.

Move to defuse arbitration risk

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ahead with the additional port facility project worth $250m in foreign investment if the earlier investment agreement was not honoured.

Both the ministries of energy (petroleum) and law concluded, after reviewing the documentation, that a violation of the implementation agreement had already occurred and that unilateral termination or continued non-payment would be difficult to defend legally. A summary placed before the ECC outlined options, including full payment on termination or completion of the remaining term, or a negotiated settlement, noting that security and maintenance costs were continuing and that about 8,000 tonnes of furnace oil were currently in storage.

Most stakeholders warned that escalation into arbitration would send a bad signal for foreign investment and damage Pakistan's credibility, particularly at a time when attracting external capital was a priority.

In a statement, the Ministry of Finance said the ECC had constituted a committee comprising representatives of the petroleum division, finance division, law and justice division, the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) and PSO, under the ambit of the National Task Force-Implementation of Reforms (power division). The committee has been tasked with formulating a way forward by Jan 31.

"The committee will negotiate the terms of the implementation agreement, including the guarantee agreement and letter of agreement, with APL and will also decide on the question of ownership of fuel and the alternative use of the pipeline," it said.

Supplementary grants

Separately, the ECC approved supplementary grants including Rs7.081bn for the defence division — Rs2bn for the Sustainable Development Goals Achievement Programme in Punjab and Rs5.081bn for defence services covering capacity enhancement, infrastructure development, community engagement and cyber security.

The committee decided the amount would be released in phases and incorporated into the regular defence budget from the next financial year.

It also approved Rs322.87m for the Directorate General of Special Education to purchase 15 coasters for transporting special children enrolled at an Autism Centre of Excellence being set up in Islamabad, and an Rs800m grant for the IT and telecommunication division to establish an Asan Khidmat Centre in Islamabad.

The ECC cleared an additional Rs3.7bn for Public Sector Development Programme projects to strengthen digital connectivity, enhance IT infrastructure, promote e-governance and support the national ICT ecosystem.

It allowed Rs10bn for the Federal Board of Revenue to set up digital enforcement stations along the Indus, Hub and Balochistan rivers, with Rs3bn to be released in the current quarter and the remaining Rs7bn in the fourth quarter of the fiscal year. The committee approved Rs1bn for the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's Film and Drama Finance Fund.

'Limited options' for Pakistan

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has limited options to circumvent this "final and conclusive" order by the US president.

With the possibility of exemptions almost non-existent, Islamabad can either attempt to further informalise trade with Iran or scale back engagement at a domestic economic cost. But none of these choices is without consequence.

The US move fits squarely within Trump's revived "maximum pressure" doctrine, first deployed after Washington's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. Then, the emphasis was on financial isolation through banking sanctions and oil export restrictions. Now, the pressure is being extended through tariffs, shifting the burden from firms and banks to entire national economies.

Yet the announcement leaves critical questions unanswered. The most basic concern is the definition of "doing business." The phrase is left deliberately broad. It could be read to include all forms of trade, investment, services or financial interaction, without any threshold or exemption. There is no explanation about whether humanitarian trade, such as food and medicine, is excluded, nor whether legacy contracts or indirect transactions would be treated differently.

Equally unclear is the scope of "any and all business being done with the United States." Tariffs under US law apply to imported goods, not services or capital flows. If interpreted narrowly, the measure would still raise effective tariff rates significantly for countries trading with Iran, some of whom are already subject to existing duties. If interpreted expansively, it would push beyond established legal authority and invite domestic and international challenges.

The question of currency is another unresolved issue. The statement makes no reference to dollar-denominated transactions. In practice, this suggests that the tariff threat is not linked to the use of the US financial system but to trade access itself. That distinction matters.

Over the past decade, Iran and its trading partners have increasingly relied on non-dollar mechanisms, including barter and local currencies, to bypass financial sanctions. Apparently, the new tariff tied to US bound exports would apply regardless of how Iran-related trade is settled, reducing the effectiveness of such workarounds but at the same time reinforcing incentives to diversify away from the US market.

Blanket tariff

What distinguishes this move from previous sanctions regimes is its breadth. Traditional secondary sanctions target specific entities, allowing governments to compartmentalise compliance. A blanket tariff applied at the country level removes that flexibility. Even minimal or symbolic trade with Iran could, in theory, trigger penalties on entirely unrelated exports to the US. This transforms sanctions from a targeted tool into a form of collective economic pressure.

For Iran, the likely impact is further economic contraction. The country is already grappling with inflation, unemployment and currency depreciation — conditions that have underpinned recent unrest. Reducing its remaining trade channels may deepen these pressures, with consequences felt most acutely by ordinary citizens rather than the Iranian state apparatus.

International reaction is still taking shape, but fault lines are already visible. China, Iran's largest trading partner and principal buyer of its oil, has openly rejected what it describes as unilateral coercion. Compliance would come at a strategic and economic cost that Beijing appears unwilling to bear.

Other partners, including India, Turkiye and Gulf states, face more complex calculations, balancing exposure to the US market against regional and energy considerations. The European governments, long critical of extraterritorial US measures, are likely to view the move as another erosion of multilateral trade norms, even if their response remains muted.

For now, Islamabad appears to have settled on a strategy of watchful waiting. None of the relevant quarters were prepared to offer an on record assessment of the announcement, reflecting the sensitivity and uncertainty surrounding its possible implementation. Despite repeated requests for comment, officials remained circumspect, privately acknowledging the risks of premature positioning. As one senior officer put it bluntly, "why should we stick out our neck?"

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Eligibility

For eligibility and further details, please visit the University website (www.uoas.edu.pk)

- GAT (General) will be conducted for admission in M.Sc. (Hons) degree and GAT (subject) for Ph.D Degree Programs.
- 50% qualifying score for M.Sc. (Hons) and 60% qualifying score is required for Ph.D. degree programs.
- Valid GAT-General for M.Sc (Hons) and GAT-Subject for Ph.D conducted by NTS is also acceptable.

Admission Procedure

1. Candidates shall apply online for admission test on university website (www.uoas.edu.pk) or direct link (http://portal.uoas.edu.pk/).
2. Test fee of Rs.1500/- (Non-Refundable) should be deposited at any branch of the Bank of Khyber, Account No. PK42KHYB 5203003004012339, University of Agriculture Swat.
3. Hard copies of Admission Test forms along with bank receipt of Rs. 1500/- must reach to the DASAR office on or before **January 28th, 2026**.
4. University Admission Test will be held on **January 31st, 2026.**
5. Only those candidates who have submitted the University Admission Test Form to the DASAR office within the due date will be allowed in the entry test. No forms will be entertained after the due date.
6. Test result and admission forms will be available on the university admission portal http://portal.uoas.edu.pk/ from **February 2nd, 2026.**
7. Successful Candidates shall appear for interview and verification of documents on **Feb 7th, 2026.**
8. The selected candidates should submit the admission forms and required documents (duly attested) to the DASAR office by **February 13th, 2026.**

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